

My husband and I are pilots and own a Piper Arrow which is based at College Park. We were displaced from September 11 until the airport recently reopened, and we have submitted to the US Secret Service briefings and background checks. We now check in with the operations desk of the airport before we depart, and we keep a propeller lock on the plane as required. We have filed flight plans with Leesburg Flight Service and complied with all procedures.

I do not think the system makes much sense, however. On April 5, we called and filed a flight plan and departed Ocean City MD (OXB) for a return trip to College Park Airport (CGS). The trip normally takes us about 35 minutes. Once airborne, I tried to call Leesburg Radio on the frequency provided by the briefer, 122.6. I called on that frequency about fifteen times (there was also an Aztec on the same frequency; I did not note his tail number) with no response, so we tried every other frequency listed on the charts. After about forty calls, I called Patuxent Approach and asked them to raise Leesburg on the landline. They did, and I was halfway home before I could activate the flight plan.

From there, I had to call Patuxent again for flight following. They gave me a transponder code, tracked me on radar for maybe six miles, and turned me over to Baltimore Approach. Baltimore quizzed me about my clearance into CGS, changed the transponder code, tracked me across the Bay, and turned me over to Andrews Approach in the vicinity of Freeway Airport. Andrews quizzed me about clearances (all of this should have been apparent from the flight plan, which included my secret code), vectored me well north of the area, changed the transponder code, never cleared me into the TFR until I specifically asked about that, and when I was about three miles from the airport, turned me over to Washington Approach.

As usual on Sunday afternoons, Washington Approach was swamped. We were on an upwind approach to what we thought was the right runway (we couldn't change frequency to check the AWOS weather reports during all of this) when we finally made contact with Washington Approach, who immediately cleared us into CGS.

I do not see how this procedure, which is onerous, keeps the nation safe. Forty calls to FSS, three transponder changes, interaction with four air traffic controllers, and vectoring around -- in 35 minutes. The weather was perfect that day, and we fly with two pilots aboard. I can easily see where this could rattle a single pilot in less than perfect conditions.

I would suggest a couple things. I think all three Maryland airports ought to be under the control of Andrews, which rarely sounds terribly busy. If necessary, assign a special frequency for clearance into the TFR.

Procedural problems aside, treating the pilots at these three airports like potential terrorists seems to be very poor policy to me. None of the airports is large enough to accommodate planes with significant payloads to carry much hazardous material, and the planes based here don't carry a lot more fuel than the SUVs that drive through Washington every day (which also have the room and weight-bearing ability to carry well more than any of the planes can carry). Putting these airports in a special category also doesn't make sense logistically -- Freeway Airport is only seven miles away, but it's not considered a terrorist threat.

My impression is that the management of College Park has done an exemplary job of keeping the pilots informed and dealing well with all of us, but the fact remains that the TFR is strangling business. The maintenance shop and avionics

shop have moved out, and the list of tenants is about a third what it was. Making the airport more difficult to fly into can only keep others away, and it's a shame. The current policies contribute nothing to public safety; in fact, by prohibiting training operations (like approaches and practice take offs and landings) the policy diminishes the safety at the field.

Please, restore the operations in the Washington area to what they were before September 11. Pilots are among the most responsible and reliable members of the community, and none of us would do anything to jeopardize safety or security. I don't much mind the added security at the airport, and having a propeller lock on the plane is not a hardship, but the procedures as published are. Please restore normal operations.